

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

Introduction to Process

One of the most successful approaches toward attaining a qualitative assessment of an organization is to conduct small focus group meetings with key community stakeholders. This approach allows the consultant to glean from a cross section of citizens the strengths, weaknesses and perceived opportunities with regard to the current and future operations of the organization. This method of soliciting input has been used in a variety of settings with a multitude of public and private sector agencies.

The staff of the Alexandria Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities created a list of key community stakeholders to invite to the focus group sessions. Typically, key community stakeholders are defined as anyone having a vested interest in the outcome of the agency's mission. A broad list of stakeholders was developed and personal invitations were sent from the Mayor to each stakeholder requesting their participation in the process.

Methodology

Key stakeholder focus group meetings were conducted on six separate days during October, November, December 2001, and February 2002. A total of twenty-three separate focus group interviews were conducted, involving 204 individuals. These interviews were conducted with various staff, community leaders, City Council members, Steering Committee members and interested citizens in Alexandria. The purpose of the focus group meetings was to identify the key issues to be resolved in the Recreation Needs Assessment and to develop an understanding of community perceptions regarding the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities.

These meetings were typically conducted in groups of ten to twelve people. There were a few occasions where the groups were smaller in number. The interviewers asked all groups the same set of questions, which were designed to cover a variety of topics representing all facets of the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural activities.

The findings from these interviews served as a foundation for the development of the Public Opinion Survey, which was distributed in March 2002.

Summary

In general, the community is pleased with the department and the level of service provided. The staff is recognized as supportive and professional. Facilities are clean, and the recent attention given to renovations and facility upgrades is recognized as a key attribute of the park system. The community acknowledges the department's efforts to be responsive to citizens' needs. The community recognizes that the department is attempting to satisfy a variety of divergent interest groups. It was acknowledged that the department should establish achievable levels of service instead of trying to be all things to all people. There is significant interest in having the department identify a variety of new ways to fund capital development and operations. There is also an expectation that the department identify and develop new partnerships to help solve

existing and emerging issues. It is expected that some of these new partnerships could provide additional methods for funding capital development and operations.

Citizens were particularly interested in seeing the department find solutions to the lack of open space and park space. They expect the department to adequately project the emerging needs of the community and to position the delivery of future services accordingly.

There is much interest in identifying the appropriate configuration of indoor programming space for senior citizens and teens. The increased demand for facilities to accommodate organized sports has put a unique burden on an already heavily developed park system, and citizens are interested in solving the demand issue without jeopardizing existing open spaces.

Key Findings

The key issues to be resolved in the plan include:

- Maintenance of existing facilities.
- Addressing the changing demographics of the community.
- How to Manage with the limited park space available while addressing a growing demand for facilities and park space.
- The lack of parking at existing facilities.
- The need to create more designated space for athletic facilities.
- How to involve the business community and other partners in solving key park and recreation issues.
- Transportation access for youth.
- The need for programs and facilities for youth and seniors.
- Use of school facilities as community assets.
- Providing more after-school programs.
- Adaptive re-use of facilities that receive little use, such as swimming pools.
- Managing the amount of cultural and special events held every year in the city.
- Finding a balance between active and passive park space.
- Positioning the park and recreation system to tap into new sources of funding while providing inclusion for all who want to participate.
- Addressing the needs of the single adult population.
- How to deal with the perceived need for more dog parks.
- How to manage the provision of new types of recreation such as skate parks, trails, and connectivity to places of public value.
- Ensuring the safety of young people at recreation facilities.
- How to fund operational and capital needs.
- Working with developers to create public spaces, appropriate land uses, and to provide public amenities.
- The need to protect existing open space in the city.

The greatest recreation program needs were identified as:

- Finding strategies to keep teens engaged in productive activities beyond the early teens.
- Addressing the increased demand for organized sports programs.
- Aquatic programs that meet the needs of all age groups.
- Nature-based programs.

- Serving the special needs of people with disabilities.
- Providing adequate space and programs for senior citizens.
- Providing arts and festival programs.
- Effectively dealing with the before and after-school needs of young people.

The greatest facility needs were identified as:

- Managing an aging infrastructure.
- Finding more open space and park space.
- Elevating maintenance standards at some locations.
- Providing new types of facilities as demands emerge.
- Development of indoor facilities that address the multi-generational make up of the community.

There was a broad perspective of perceived mandates in the community. The key themes included:

- Identifying and establishing achievable levels of service versus trying to be all things for all people.
- Achieving acceptable levels of maintenance at all facilities.
- Development of more trails.
- Beautification of the city.
- Water and stream cleanup.
- Adequately funding the park and recreation system.
- Finding appropriate partners.
- Staying current with citizens' needs and finding effective methods to meet those needs.
- Better care of the environment.
- Creating relationships with other service providers and parks agencies.
- Better coordination with the school system.

The vision for the future includes:

- A well-balanced agency that commands respect from the community.
- An agency that is proactive to the needs of citizens.
- Solving the open space and park space needs of the community.
- Demonstrating the value of recreation to citizens.
- A Department that is adequately funded and provides well-developed and maintained facilities.
- An agency that acts as exceptional stewards of the natural environment, providing equitable services and facilities for all residents.

The following is a listing of the questions and responses from the focus groups

1) What are the most pressing issues that should be addressed in this plan?

- Keep up existing facilities.
- Respond to needs of populations.
- Resolve children playing on properties
- Keep up with feeder programs and changing sports demand
- Limited amount of space versus growing interest in team sports.
- Do you focus on demand or supply?

- How do you involve business community?
- Be sure you have a wide variety of activities, especially for kids.
- How to get diverse population serviced.
- Distribution of the space, i.e., Kids need to be in their neighborhood, e.g., skateboarding, need a place to have the activity that is legal, and appropriate.
- Youth accessibility to programs and facilities.
- Transportation
- Recreation center for the Cameron Station, area is highly concentrated with people without cars or transportation, (Southport is ideal location), may need more cooperation with Dash, school system accessibility
- Trails connectivity, cost needs to be a consideration. Swimming at Chinquapin is expensive for some families and should be affordable for all through discounts, sliding scales or some other way to include them.
- Some parks are compartmentalized, e.g., Landover Park is disconnected from the pool – should be better connected to make them useable
- Concept of anchors – pools, libraries, parks, ball fields, use them as anchors and connect everything between them together – maybe with trails: should reduce maintenance cost, could affect how you program for different ages at different times also, important to use facilities more fully
- Need a drop-in program for youth, Look to be able to meet the needs of the future
- Need cross-cultural programs; the prime emphasis is now on traditional American sports.
- Take appropriate advantage of technology and other leisure opportunities.
- Availability of outdoors space and indoors space; use indoor as efficiently as possible. The location of the facility determines the type of programs offered, and the hours of operation, etc.
- Need to look at additional space in the schools; find a way to enhance the offerings in schools to be used as recreation centers.
- Look at enlarging the geographic areas for program delivery and plan together with schools.
- Need in the George Mason area for more time and space
- No track on west end now and they need one. Transportation is a concern and the city should be able to make an arrangement with private schools for track and additional field space.
- Need for better maintenance on existing facilities, such as tennis courts; some tennis courts are being used for other activities such as soccer and roller hockey.
- We need to address the facilities we are losing.
- We need to decide who we are – urban, suburban, etc. and then have the community recognize who we are.
- The amount of cultural events is huge – we need not be so insular.
- Our school system is an untapped resource. This needs to be addressed.
- We don't have the luxury of having activities in every neighborhood, therefore transportation to facilities is an issue
- Fees need to be addressed; we should establish a baseline of services and build fees around the baseline while ensuring inclusion.
- Identify and meet the requests of the community. Need to be determine how to meet the program and infrastructure needs of the community.

- Maintain existing facilities to an acceptable standard.
- Need to find a balance with active and passive areas, the natural and developed areas.
- Is the city getting sufficient space for recreation?
- The next priority is how to use that space.
- Management of the open space. How to use that land?
- Dog parks and soccer fields.
- Be very specific on the land uses regarding parks.
- Build in more active recreation space.
- The city is at the crossroads on the key decisions.
- Want to be a key friendly city.
- The council will follow the plan if we identify the key issues and we provide them the road map for them to follow.
- Manage the future, not the immediate.
- Can we be forward looking, looking toward twenty years from now?
- Seniors need to be addressed.
- Young people who are not involved in a sport
- Are the recreation centers not providing the right programs?
- Multi-generational center is needed.
- Pack in what is not offered in the other centers.
- An Olympic size pool is needed
- Seniors are going to Fairfax as their outlet.
- A dog park is a key issue that needs to be addressed.
- Bike trails review.
- Multi-purpose game fields are needed.
- Field use policies need to be addressed.
- Teens needs should be addressed, especially the possibility of a roller rink.
- A skate park is needed.
- More small neighborhood gathering places that are passive.
- Identify common space for neighborhoods.
- More parks that are passive versus active.
- Lobby groups that advocate for single use.
- A lot of racial polarization of activities.
- Find ways to provide programs and facilities that demonstrate fairness and move away from entitlement.
- Pulling away from a traditional population and the needs are different. The worker population is changing and they are so constrained for staff.
- Mounting demands for parks needs to be managed. They don't do a lot for workers in the city.
- What do they have to serve them?
- Multi-generational facility on the west end; yes or no, and how to manage for the future.
- Recreation centers have catered to specific segment of the population; should we move away from that and move toward a more general use? Political and cultural issues related to the current use.
- Recreation centers that need some work and what to do with them. What do they need to have the recreation center look like, i.e., Patrick Henry?
- More fields, yes or no?

- Evaluation of who is being served.
- Recreation Department in general and how it is managed and financed.
- A lot of internal politics in the recreation center.
- Need to accelerate change in the department. It needs to move to a new level.
- The after-school programs in the recreation centers.
- Would like to see that the existing recreation facilities have enough operational and capital monies to keep them updated.
- Recreation centers should evaluate the staff loads versus the number of people who use the centers.
- Evaluate staff deployment.
- School age populations, age banding from K-5, and after-school vendors: the competition with private enterprise needs to be addressed. What are the areas that are amenable to fees and how to deal with free or subsidized programs and people?
- Phase timeline and recommendations need to be included.
- Geography and equity of recommendations need to be addressed.
- Make programs more inclusive rather than single focused.
- Make the recreation centers more specialized and use more of a magnet approach.
- Evaluate the demographics of the area as we make decisions.
- The adult population that is single needs to be addressed in this community; early morning and weekend programs for this age group.
- The centers sit quite empty during the day: how effectively are they deploying the resources in the recreation centers?
- Weekend offerings are geared toward the youth versus single adults.
- The competition between other service providers and the city needs to be evaluated regarding fitness facilities.

2) What are the key policy issues that need to be addressed in this plan?

- Fees and how they are applied to levels of service, somehow we need user fees to support infrastructure.
- The use of development impact fees, open space requirements and other tools to spread the responsibility to more members of the community.
- Need to look at sponsorships to “adopt a space”.
- Initial capital and ongoing maintenance needs to be addressed.
- Youth participation in decision-making.
- Funding.
- Day care v. recreation centers.
- Senior programs, what is the balance, i.e., costs v. services?
- What restrictions should we (the city) put on private developers when they develop?
- Need no net loss policy on open space; what incentives can you build in for private landowners to create more open space?
- Developers should be required to provide recreational amenities as a part of development, such as dog parks, playgrounds; should have integrated effort-requiring developers to work together when they develop new sites.
- Adopt policy that links recreation with health; involve schools with that initiative.
- Adults should be able to pay for their recreation; not feasible to expect parents to pay for all recreation – should have subsidies, scholarships.
- Inclusion is important – need equity in charging for access to facilities.

- Quality of life should be included in the health aspect.
- Wider demographic appeal – facility is targeted to minority kids.
- Basketball is the most diverse program in the city.
- Middle school nights has been the most successful program.
- The lost segment is the high school children that need attention.
- Acquire land set-asides from developers.
- Public easements will be a key acquisition strategy for the city to focus on.
- A large tract of land – should that be the center of recreation complex?
- Like complexes versus families traveling all over the city.
- The long-term strategy is most important; they need to look for the long term in the city.
- Facility buildings versus land development.
- Patrick Henry facility needs to be expanded.
- Improve the facilities you have first.
- School partnerships need to focus first on the fact that this is a public building.
- School parks.
- More after-school programs in school are needed; keep in mind safety and security issues.
- More structure at after-school programs to help them on schoolwork, etc.
- New urbanism is well entrenched here.
- School park designation is okay; it should be established and designated for priority of use by schools and city as needed.
- Chinquapin High School renovation is critical.
- Dog parks versus kids are a big issue.
- The council gets a bad rap on land preservation that is unwarranted because of their efforts to develop and preserve space.
- Multi-generational centers are a concern financially.
- More trails; trails are costly but needed.
- The bike plan is good.
- Too focused on citizen input.
- Field schedules.
- Non-residents rates.
- Get a list of the policies.
- Park maintenance standards.
- Funding for parks maintenance is a problem.
- Active areas need a lot of maintenance.
- Off-leash dog areas are needed versus having dogs on soccer fields.
- After-school policies need to be addressed in the plan.
- Standards for program needs to be addressed.
- Beautification in the city and the quality of the fields is a problem. Are they getting their money's worth?
- Recreation programs are significantly segregated and this is a problem.
- Evaluate recreation program
- 13 and older can't be in recreation centers until 6pm.
- Are we doing a good job dealing with youth?
- What are other programs could be created to attract teens?
- Rotation of staff in centers.

- Certification of staff is a good thing even if staff is resistant.
- What is the appropriate training for staff to make them more marketable?
- More staff who can speak Spanish is needed.
- Watering and maintenance of soccer fields is needed.
- Sustainability is an issue on fields; match what they can reasonably handle and the study needs to have a basis to say no.

3) What is your perspective on the competition for open space? Active vs. passive?

- Open space is essential.
- We will have to look at it differently and creatively; there are other ways to provide open space through things like easements.
- When redeveloping land we need to give careful consideration on how to preserve open space; proper planning is the key.
- In the long term we need to look at areas such as rooftops, highways, buildings, planters, etc.
- Public buildings landscape should encourage usage, not be sterile.
- Better, more comprehensive management.
- Incorporate sustainability, four mile run is more than drainage, it's also wildlife habitat. Cannot lose anymore open space, tie together to maximize for total benefit, more tracks.
- More interactive open space.
- Need bigger fields.
- More lighted fields.
- They must have sources of revenue to acquire and maintain land.
- School parks need to be developed and maintained for recreation use.
- They are a land-locked city and have competing problems for land.
- How do you deal with the land that is left?
- 40% of city residents are singles.
- A real estate transfer is needed.
- Save areas that can't be developed like the waterways.
- More passive areas are needed in the multi-family areas.
- Managed regional partnerships need to be established.
- It will not work in the city to provide more natural areas.
- Fencing of dog parks has created the problem.
- Standards need to be developed for all parks.
- Do you feel the city needs to establish acreage guidelines for population and land?
- Be very protective of what land is left.
- Waterfront access and open space is needed.

4) What are your feelings regarding a teen center, senior center, multi-generational center?

- Likes the multi-generational center idea.
- Likes the idea of stand-alone center – but the program will really drive the success; e.g., if teen center is just a hang out, then trouble will follow; needs to be comprehensive and well planned; more in favor of multi-generational center – should also have good programming for seniors.
- Transportation is an issue for many seniors.
- Do not need a designated teen center.

- Predominately needs to be in the neighborhood for seniors.
- Prefer multi-generational center over a stand-alone teen center.
- Need to reach into the community – diverse, low number of youth, many single, transient people who need recreational opportunities, the constantly changing dynamic of the community makes it a challenge.
- No real sense of equity issues like there used to be regarding the east and west end of the cities.
- Teen center is an interesting concept.
- They have to demonstrate that safety issues are addressed.
- 12, 13, and 14-year-old children need to have a safe environment.
- Stand-alone for teens.
- They should use the facilities they already have rather than build new.
- They have not taken advantage of the design alternatives that could create more cooperation.
- A renovating approach to T.C. Williams for teens is needed.
- Senior population growth is flat. A center west of town is needed.
- The department has a severe lack of open space, and they feel they tend to build mediocre facilities instead of building a great space.
- Make smaller centers specialty centers.
- The city should work with malls for senior walking.

5) What are the greatest recreation program needs in Alexandria?

- Teens (middle school).
- Senior citizens.
- More sports than are offered at high schools.
- Basketball is of high interest.
- Health, wellness, dietary.
- Computers for the children.
- A balance in programs is needed for seniors and activities that are not based around sports.
- After-school programs need to be developed.
- Computers labs and roller hockey.
- Programs for teens and seniors need to be addressed.
- Create festivals for young people.
- The arts are very important for the department.
- Concerts are very supported by the community.
- Children, teenagers, and young children are the biggest need.
- The city's programs need to be in concert with school programs.
- Service the needs of people with disabilities.
- Environmental education, nature based programs.
- Swimming.

6) What are the greatest recreation facility needs in Alexandria?

- Golf courses.
- Swimming pools.
- Teen centers.
- Sports complexes.

- Better use of schools.
- Ice rink.
- Facilities for youth, seniors, physically challenged.
- Flexibility of design for accommodation of many uses.
- Outdoor spaces need to be multi-use.
- Need off-road / safe places to ride bikes.
- Recreation facility needs for the future.
- The city and the YMCA have some disconnects in working together.
- Expand the pool at Chinguapin.
- Multiuse outdoor surface complex.
- Soccer, roller hockey, and basketball.
- Diversify the sports; lacrosse for instance.
- Field Hockey: can they develop these facilities?
- Expand into non-traditional sports.
- Women and sports.
- Girl's softball and volleyball are very important.
- More variety at the high school.
- Skateboard parks.
- A multi-generational is not needed and we need to cover this in our recommendations.
- Chinguapin needs to be redeveloped to hold swim meets.
- Use existing facilities by renovating them to address senior citizens.
- Computer labs in recreation centers.
- Irrigate all playing fields.
- Re-use of existing space.
- Charles Houston and Patrick Henry need to be updated.
- Indoor track is needed.
- Ice rink needed.
- Regional facilities shared and developed are a good idea.
- Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority needs to work with the city on development of facilities.
- National Park Service management with city needs to be established to meet on strategies for regional issues – maybe a regional planning retreat on updating facilities.

7) What are the community mandates in Alexandria?

- More places for off-leash dogs.
- Services must be accessible.
- Non-discrimination.
- Care of the environment.
- Removal of exotic and non-native plants.
- Stream bank restoration
- Wildlife habitat protection and enhancement.
- Children want their own teen center, access to school space, more recreation centers with Internet access.
- Does not think the community has an understanding of what parks and recreation is all about.
- Communication with the community.

- Better coordination with the school system.
- Some people were for a center in the west end in the past.
- Need to link with other parks and recreation service providers such as Fairfax County.
- Expect facilities that are truly recreational offerings; we don't have them in our part of the city.
- Number of fields and inability to rotate them; enhance the condition of fields and increase the number of them; involve the users in the maintenance.
- Mandate to improve the department by the council.
- Maintenance mandate is in plan.
- Pick up and improve the place, especially the after-school space.
- Operation and recreation staff issues are in place.
- Integrated uses need to be addressed.
- More open space, park issue.
- All needs to be met by the community expectations.
- More teen activities.
- More soccer fields.
- Do not take away what they have, but maintenance is very poor.
- Don't try to be all things for all people.
- Develop partnerships with other service providers.

8) Who are the potential partners for Parks and Recreation?

- Clubs.
- Service organizations.
- Create outreach opportunities for service clubs.
- Shopping malls.
- Retailers – use their facilities such as parking lots on weekends when they are not in use.
- Federal agencies such as the National Park Service, e.g., Huntley Meadows, schools, corporate neighbors use their open space.
- Private schools.
- Need to integrate with the NPS for use of properties (Dangerfield Island).
- Parking lots at Malls.
- YMCA, hospitals.
- Health Department.
- Extension service.
- Better relationship with the Y.
- Would like to see trying a partnership with use of fields on private schools.
- Funding partners should include more funding for capital and operations.
- They do not have a good relationship in the private sector with businesses and foundations.
- Park foundations and not-for-profit partnerships.
- Fee based for adult sports is okay for effective prices.
- Partnerships with youth organizations are good and need to keep going.
- Partnership with the department and the minority community needs to be better.
- Business community partnerships need to be developed.
- YMCA partnerships, hospitals.

- Sea Port Foundation.
- Police boys and girls camp.
- 4-H extension program.
- Senior partnerships.
- Transportation is needed for youth.
- Torpedo Factory is a partnership that could be developed and the art league.
- Civic stations need to be looked at.
- They don't ask community organizations to be a part of the solution.

9) What are your feelings about adaptive use of existing parks to meet the citizens changing recreation needs?

- Adaptive reuses are okay.
- Removal of community use needs to be done.
- It will take a lot of good statistical data to convince the public.
- Are we short of gym facilities?
- What are we short in?
- Yes, that is important and they need to be better at this.
- Respond to the activity changes.
- Skateboard parks are needed.
- Establish standards for use that demonstrate a need to decline in the plan.
- Not confident that the Council will follow the recommendations from the plan.
- School parks need to be made adaptive.
- Add benches to school parks.

10) What is your vision for the next ten-years?

- A well-balanced agency with a vision, goals, and responsibilities that commands respect.
- More education about the value of parks and recreation needs to occur in the community.
- The city having more input regarding how property gets used.
- Continue to grow and work with other agencies to put out the best product.
- Respect from citizens regarding department operations.
- Recognize department as proactive in meeting the needs of the community.
- Innovative approaches in solving open space needs.
- Demonstrating the value of recreation and open space.
- More partnerships and broader relationships with other service providers.
- Upgraded facilities and program opportunities.

11) Are there any other issues?

- Need to get Alexandria residents to use regional parks we pay to support.
- Need a way to attract more grant money?
- Recreation Department needs to decide its primary role or core business.
- Safety of people using recreation centers; children are getting hit by cars in the roads out in front of the building; need speed control devices.
- Parking is inadequate at some centers.
- Better coordination between recreation centers.
- Need transportation coordination with the DASH bus company.
- Need better transportation in general to all recreation facilities by existing bus system.

- Need to make more use of volunteers.
- Evaluate a process to do it right. It seems that everything is an issue.
- Sell the strategies and the fact that quality of life contributes to economic development.
- Highlight the amount of turnover of residents to marketing in order to get the public to know the city and recruit them to your sites. How do we evaluate our success in recreation?
- Ask amount of recognition of residents for programs.
- What degree do we build in as part of marketing strategies?

The Following Questions and Responses are from the Focus Group Meetings with City Council, City Manager and the Mayor

1) What are the most pressing issues that should be addressed in this plan?

- Up to date technology needs to be in place.
- Training of staff is needed.
- Equipment needs should be assessed.
- Staffing levels and pay should be assessed.
- Addressing seniors' needs is necessary.
- Young people who are not involved in a sport need to be addressed.
- The need to evaluate the demographics of the area as we make decisions.
- The adult population that is single needs to be addressed in this community.
- The goals and objectives need to be followed tightly rather than following them to a point until there is a special project that pulls the attention away from what is being accomplished or worked toward. This takes away from the standards in the city and things don't get done efficiently.
- Standards for space management
- What are the areas that are amenable to fees and how should we deal with free or subsidized programs and people?
- Maintenance facilities need to be addressed.
- Volunteers need to be addressed in the city and an appreciation event needs to be held.
- Lack of a labor pool for tree contractors needs to be addressed.
- Play equipment replacement scheduled needs to be in place.
- Recruiting efforts need to be more efficient – finding staff with the qualifications within the range of salary offered.
- There are 48 to 50 employees in park maintenance; there need to be more.
- The nature center staffing needs to be reviewed and increased if necessary.
- The pressing issue for the city is getting sufficient space for recreation. The next priority is how to use that space?
- Management of the open space is needed. Ask on the survey how to use that land?
- Diversity issues as well as political and cultural problems need to be addressed.
- A strong school partnership is needed.
- The department has a severe lack of open space and they feel they tend to build mediocre facilities versus great space.

2) What policies need to be addressed?

- Practice space is an issue versus game fields.
- There is a need to build in more active recreation space.
- Lack of written policy is a problem.
- There are field use policies that need to be addressed.
- Vandalism problems exist.
- Enforcing park policies is a problem with police.
- Create park rangers to cover park issues.
- Include in the survey issues of safety and citation problems in parks.
- The centers sit pretty empty during the day and how effectively are they deploying the resources in the recreations centers.
- Weekend offerings are geared toward the youth versus single adults.
- The competition between other service providers and the city needs to be evaluated as it applies to fitness facilities.
- Be very specific on the land uses as it applies to parks.
- Mounting demands for parks needs to be managed. They don't do a lot for workers in the city.
- Continue to review staffing levels in relationship to participants.
- The after school programs need to be addressed in relationship to licensing.
- Are they getting the right bang for the dollars?
- Rotation of staff in centers is needed.
- Certification of staff desirable

3) What is your expectation of the outcomes that are desired from this Master Plan?

- The Master Plan will pull together the vision, planning, organizations, and recommendations.
- There is a feeling that the department will sit on the plan.
- The Master Plan will assist in long term capital improvement plan.
- An assessment of the recreation department in general and how it is managed and financed is needed.
- A phase timeline and recommendations over time needs to be included in our recommendations.
- Beautification in the city and the quality of the fields need to be addressed.
- Sustainability is an issue on fields and match what they can reasonably handle and the study needs to have a basis to say no.
- Plan recreation facility needs for the future.

4) What do you think the mandates are?

- It will establish the level of service that can be expected.
- Maintenance of fields will be priority.
- Keep trash out of parks.
- Mow parks.
- Respond to every call within 24 hours.
- Clean facilities.
- A certain level of recreation programs will be provided.
- Bike trials and multi-use trails will be promoted more.

- The parks and recreation facilities will serve all citizens equitably.
- Funding for parks maintenance is a problem.
- The beautification of the city will be a high priority.

5) What is your vision for the next 10 years?

- The Department will be a well balance agency with a vision, goals and responsibilities that has a lot of respect.
- Patrick Henry facility needs to be expanded.
- To manage the future, is there a need for a multi-generational facility on the west end.
- The staff feels that the city and residents view the park and recreation department as low level service and more educational efforts are needed. (Ask this on a survey).
- Off leash dog areas is needed versus having dogs on soccer fields.
- We need to continue to grow and work with other departments to put out the best product.
- There will be a respect from the citizens toward for the Department staff.
- Acquire land set-asides in the development game from developers.
- Public easements will be a key acquisition strategy for the city to focus on.
- They will have a vision and more proactive versus reactive to what parks and recreation and be recognized as a fighter for open space.
- More parks that are passive versus active are needed.
- There is a need for lobby groups that advocate for single use such as open space issues.
- There is a need to find ways to provide programs and facilities that demonstrate fairness and move away from entitlement.
- A multi-generational center is needed.
- An Olympic size pool is needed.
- The Dog parks are key issues that need to be addressed.
- Bike trails review is needed.
- Game fields that are multi-purpose are needed.
- Market the agency to the public.
- The City missed the boat on open space and now needs to do some innovative things to develop open space.
- We need to change the perspective on the value of recreation and make it an investment for people.
- As more commercial development grows, what kind of space needs to be provided and how many more partnerships are needed?
- Environmental issues are adequately prioritized and funded.
- There is a need to make the recreation centers more specialized and create a more magnet approach.
- Administrative staff be funded to the level that is required.
- We will need to upgrade the resources and add more manpower.

6) What do you think that people value?

- Open space.
- Game fields.
- Beautification and high standards.
- Natural environment.

- Neighborhood Parks – develop equity maps.
- Facilities, and programs that are provided by the Recreation Department.
- Safety
- Equity
- Responsiveness
- Tree canopy's that are left
- Waterfront.

7) Most pressing recreation needs

- Baseball, softball, and soccer fields are needed.
- Play grounds
- Hard Surface Trails
- Dog parks
- Pools
- ADA compliance
- Nature based programs
- There is a need for early morning and weekend programs for the adult singles.
- More staff that can speak Spanish is needed.
- Expand pool at chinquapin
- Multiuse surface complex that is outdoor is needed.
- Women and sports are important.
- Use existing facilities by renovating them to address senior citizens.
- All playing fields need irrigation.

8) What is the most important program needs of this city pertaining to youth, teens and adults?

- A balance in program needs for seniors and other activities that are not based around sports are needed.
- After school programs need to be developed.
- Computers labs and roller hockey are needed.
- Programs for teens and seniors need to be addressed.
- Create festivals for young people.
- The arts are very important for the department.
- Concerts are very supported by the community.
- Children, teenagers and young children are the biggest need.
- The cities programs need to be in sync with school programs.

9) Are there partnerships outside of the school district the city should be developing that are not in place?

- We need a better relationship with the Y and the Boys and Girls club.
- Would like to see the Department try partnerships with use of fields at private schools.
- Funding partners should include more funding for capital and operational costs.
- Park foundations and not for profit partnerships are needed.

- Business community partnerships need to be developed.
- Sea Port Foundation partnership is needed.
- Transportation is needed for youth.

The Following Questions and Responses are from the Park and Recreation Commission Interviews

1) Needs Assessment:

- More soccer fields and open space land are needed.
- Facilities that can accommodate the older generation especially the older senior generation are needed.
- Adult soccer fields are lacking as well and practice spaces.
- There are a lot of single adults in the city that need to be served.
- The field space needs are the most pressing league issue.
- The teen's needs are high in the community.
- Skateboard parks are needed.
- High school rugby and girls football are growing sports.
- We need to tie recreation to health issues in the city.
- More women sports are needed in the city.
- Trails, pools, indoor tracks are needed.
- Transportation is needed for middle school aged children.
- Adult sports needs are high as well as youth.
- Safety of the children is a major concern in recreation centers.
- User fees should apply to adults and the youth should be subsidized.
- User fees are a major issue and should be put in effect and utilized.
- The commission needs to have a workshop on fees and charges.
- Ice Rink may need to be tested in the survey.

2) What is your expectation of the Master Plan/ Needs Assessment?

- They need to resolve the use recreation facilities.
- Recreation Centers need to be called community centers.
- What lines of businesses should we be in?
- What are our mandates, what standards should we abide by.
- How much are we willing to pay for maintenance levels.
- Public restrooms in parks are needed.
- Spray pools need to replace small pools in the city.
- Visioning is needed in the city.
- There is a huge lack of trust with the city.
- Use regional park authority and partner with them on services.
- What are the other trend amenities and programs that are missing in the city that we should address?

The Following Questions and Responses are from the Meeting With Arts Commission, Environmental Policy Committee, Waterfront Committee.

1) Areas to be resolved:

- How do we support a performing arts area at the Patient and Trade office?
- The parks and recreation department needs to provide neighborhood events and make them more proactive.
- The department needs to provide more structure in the arts.
- Specialty Arts Centers have become the most successful spaces for arts to work in the centers.
- Drama, dance, and music, as well as fine arts, need to be a part of the recreation department.
- Marketing of the arts needs to be developed.
- More arts venues need to be provided by the city.
- The arts need a strategic plan
- 1% or 2% arts commitment by developers need to be perused by the city.
- The name of the Department should be changed to the Department of Parks, Cultural Services and Recreation.
- The city and the Arts Commission need to have a larger staff and a partnership agreement.
- The city should reclaim underutilized facilities and redeveloped them into arts facilities.
- We need to ask questions on the survey that focus on: How often do you attend an arts event? How is important is the arts to you and your family? How well do you think that Alexandria serves the community?
- Martial arts are non-existent in the city and needs to be a part of the community.
- Advocacy seems to be a major issue with the arts commission.
- Arts education is needed in the city.

The Following Responses are from the Department Head Meeting.

- The areas for children to play are a problem that needs to be addressed especially west of 395.
- The economically disadvantaged need more than the people can afford.
- Substance abuse is an issue that needs to address.
- Very few families have a parent at home after school.
- Some space for mixing groups with various age segments is needed.
- Multi-dimensional space is really needed to support programs.
- The small area plans of the city do not address parks and recreation.
- Cross communication and cross marketing needs are prevalent.
- There is a need for recreation for people with disabilities.
- Women and girls sports drop out rates are high – 11 to 14.
- What is the total amount of money spent on children in the city?
- Space changes need to be made in order to serve youth between 5 to 14 years of age.
- Most people can't pay to use facilities and the space needs to be dedicated per various user groups.
- A tiered level of fees is very difficult to obtain.

- There should be an incentive program for collection of fees.
- The department needs 501-C-3 organizations including friends groups.
- Does the department need to have working relationships?
- Levels of ground maintenance standards need to be communicated.
- The arborist gets pulled in many directions.
- The Parks and Recreation image is difficult to put your arms around.
- The department does not have enough staff.
- The department needs to include other departments in the planning processes.
- The 11 to 15 age groups need the most focus.
- There is a need for development of Regional facilities with Arlington and Fairfax County.
- Is the city into too many businesses?
- Rational allocation may not be acceptable in this political mindset.
- Diversity issues need to be addressed.
- Tree trimming is a tough issue here. Two-thirds are on contract and staff does one-third.
- A tree fund needs to be developed.
- After school care at the recreation centers is needed.
- Lack of supervision at day camps and after school programs needs to be addressed.
- Standards need to be in place.
- Computer centers and the city involvement need to be coordinated.

Responses From Seniors and Other Service Providers In the City

- Limited space is a tough problem.
- Low-income seniors need transportation to recreation events.
- Not a lot of support for seniors exists.
- Transportation for children is needed.
- More teen activities are needed.
- A skateboard park is needed.
- There is a need for benches in Old Town.
- Chinquapin should be a senior center because of where they live.
- More programs for children and teens are needed.
- The city's priorities for funding are in youth, people with disabilities, immigrants, and families.
- Summer is the problem for the seniors because of youth services.
- Comfortable space, food, places for music, and card rooms are needed.
- Chinquapin should be redesigned to accommodate seniors.
- Programming that stimulates the mind is needed.
- Senior Clubs need space where they can gather.
- The option of assistance in club development needs to be available.
- Marketing for seniors is an issue.
- Chinquapin prices should be freer for seniors.
- A review of fee schedules is needed.
- Look at mind, body and spirit in the broad sense, and look at what site-specific policy approaches are needed.

- There are playground equity issues in the city and an evaluation of the playgrounds is needed.
- Program equity needs evaluation in the city.
- Every program for seniors is free. This should not always be the case.
- The Seaport Foundation provides opportunities for seniors and youth for people to experience the resources as it applies to Potomac River.
- The city staff needs to be more involved in environmental programs and education.
- Parks and recreation staff should be mitigating some of the stream cover.
- The not-for profit organizations need a plan on how to work together.
- The city should take a lead on how not-for-profits are developed and how to manage duplication.
- Alexandria does not have a place for children to hang out.
- The Prime Time Page for seniors in the Gazette needs to have more programs that offer more stuff over the cable TV.
- The city needs to have a senior cable show that is dedicated to senior living and issues that seniors face.
- Partnerships are improving over the last five years in parks and recreation.
- Collaboration between the city and Campagna center for day camps and after school programs is needed.
- The need for drop in programs is no longer needed.
- T.C high school partners well.
- Partnering summits are needed and teaching people how to partner is key.
- Developing more uniform standards for partnerships is needed.
- The city does not use Federal Parks for recreation purposes.
- The city needs to have chess and checkers boards in city parks.

The Following Questions and Responses are from the Meeting Notes with the Alexandria Program Staff

1) The current core businesses for the city are?

- After School programs/camps.
- Teens.
- Seniors.
- Aquatic.
- Sports.
- Cultural activities.

2) What are the key-issues that you are faced with in doing your jobs?

- Revenue producing programs at Chinguapin are hard to predict.
- City needs to support the recreational use of the parks even if they are in residential neighborhoods.
- The environment is politically charged but the staff has to uphold the policies and procedures.
- The city manager, director and city council need to support the policies in place.
- The squeaky wheel still gets what it wants.

- One indoor aquatic facility causes too much conflict between competitive and recreational use.
- Parking is a problem in many facilities and there is little consideration for parking in the design of the parks.
- Teens need to be involved in planning the activities they are involved in.
- Cyber cafés and designated space is needed for teens.
- Older age teens are hard to attract to existing centers.
- The staff feels they are understaffed.
- Lack of meeting space is a problem.
- A marketing division is needed to track feedback from users.

3) What do you measure?

- We measure numbers and attendance.
- We track budget costs.
- We measure customer satisfaction.
- We measure post evaluations and pre-evaluations.
- We send out surveys to the community.
- Not all staff evaluate the programs.
- We do program goals and activity goals.
- Program standards are inconsistent and not all written.
- Chinquapin is expected to recoup 80% of expenses of direct costs.
- Adult sports are responsible for recovery of 100% of direct cost.
- Admission fees cannot be changed or discounted.

4) Residents and non-residents use.

- We rely on non-residents to fill out teams.
- Pricing decisions on programs are inconsistent across the city.
- We are not charging for therapeutic services.

5) What earned income opportunities do you create?

- There is no incentive for going after earned income and they can't keep it in the programs.
- We have some base line programs but no tiered programs in place.
- Revenue Philosophy needs to be consistent across the city.
- Although we have advisory councils that can raise money, we really don't utilize this very much.
- Customer service plans and business plans are not in place.

6) What are your training needs?

- Customer service needs to be ongoing.
- Computer training in Activities Based Costing is needed.
- Evaluation and customer feedback is needed.
- Communication training is needed.
- Business plan training is needed.
- Training in human interaction and conflict with youth development and how to positively deal with youth is needed.

- Volunteer training is warranted but they do not have a system for training.

7) What is your vision for the future for the recreation program section of this department?

- Therapeutic section should incorporate a wider demographic of people.
- There is a need for more staff and resources to address therapeutic needs.
- Youth sports diversity is needed
- Need more space for youth sports.
- More recreation facilities – both indoors and outdoors – are needed.
- A weight room for Core Kelly and small pool and tennis court are needed.
- There is a need for a master plan of action for participants who use the services and for staff to plan for what they need to do.
- There is a need for more trust in the department.
- There is a need to ensure the lower income people don't get left behind in the economic engine of the city.
- The department staff has a significant role and holds an understanding of what people do in the department. The race issue has been addressed in the department.
- The balance between the free and pay programs is needed.
- The recreation department should be the informal education piece of people's lives.
- Invest in excellence as it applies to processes and systems. We need to plan our work and work our plan.
- We would like to see the department prosper and that the staff understands what each other does.
- Space for programs in the department is needed.
- Training for staffing at all levels in the department is needed.
- More Hispanic programs in the centers are needed.
- The expectation of the plan is that it will be accessible and usable for all staff and the plan gets instituted into the system.
- There is a need for the cultural arts to be integrated into the department at a higher level.
- There is a need for more money for the arts to grow and more contracting of staff to do the programming in the city.
- Better ways to address special diversity needs and blend them into programs developed is needed.
- Re-structure our operational procedures to bring comprehensive focus to specific areas such as a marketing section. A program section, for teens, special events, and adults is needed.
- Core businesses are defined.
- A visionary environment is needed.
- We need to re-evaluate our policy and procedures and make them less restricted. We need to have fewer forms.
- There is a need for better partnerships with the schools on use of facilities.
- Be more involved in corporate America as it applies to delivery services.

PUBLIC FORUM SUMMARY

PROS facilitated four public forum meetings in the City of Alexandria focusing on each planning area of the city. Approximately, 80 residents in total attended the four workshops. PROS asked all attendees the same set of questions. PROS opened each public forum by introducing the Master Plan process and discussed the key issues to be addressed in the Master Plan.

The key issues the public felt relevant and to address in the Master Plan are as follows.

- Better communication needed with citizens regarding park maintenance and development.
- Police presence is needed within parks.
- More funding is required for land acquisition and park improvements.
- A community technology center is needed to better serve citizens and to provide training for the workforce and for youth after school programs.
- Partner with schools for facility development.
- Correct the litter problem within the city and educate the public regarding recycling and keeping the city cleaner.
- Multi-lingual signage communicating littering is needed.
- There is a need for more city trails. Survey the public for their interest in foot and bike trails.
- Conduct community forums to resolve conflicts between competing interest in parks and trails.
- Recreation departments and area businesses should partner together to move the city through the re-development transition.
- The city needs to place economic value on preserving natural areas and promoting more programming focusing on nature and education.
- The community needs additional indoor swimming facilities.
- Create balance between the development of dog parks and its turf care.
- When developing new trails, determine the various trail users and their needs.
- Create more recreational services in the realm of special events, programs for youth and seniors.
- Equity of access to parks and programs is required.